



State of Wisconsin
Department of Public Instruction
Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent

*** STATE EDUCATION CONVENTION ADDRESS ***

State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster

WASB • WASDA • WASBO
State Education Convention Address

Midwest Airline Center, Milwaukee
January 17, 2007

Thank you, Joe Heinzelman, WASDA President, Oakfield, for that kind introduction, your invitation to speak today, and for welcoming us to our state education convention.

And thank you to the Kettle Moraine High School Laser Strings, directed by Susan Chandler. As a former choir director, music educator, and the daughter of a music educator, I know firsthand how the arts feed the soul and the imagination. We thank our student musicians and their teacher for their wonderful performance this morning. Let's give them another round of applause.

I am so honored to serve as your state superintendent.

Thank you for the tremendous commitment you demonstrate as elected school board members, school district administrators, and school business officials in serving the children, public schools, and communities of Wisconsin. You have some of the toughest jobs in the state, and yet you consistently bring local communities together around our shared responsibility to provide a quality education for all our children.

I would like to thank and recognize the efforts of your associations' and their executive directors:

- John Ashley and all of WASB
- Miles Turner, WASDA, and
- Woody Wiedenhoeft and WASBO.

They do a great job representing and bringing you together. Let's give them a hand.

While I meet with many of you during the course of the year, this annual joint convention is a truly unique opportunity, and one of the most important conventions of the year.

Your vision and work at the grass-roots level ignites public support for our schools.

The leadership you provide individually at the local level lifts our schools to national heights and our children to their hopes and dreams of a bright future. Local control is the heart and soul of Wisconsin's progressive tradition.

The leadership your organizations provide at the state level is a strong voice for our children and is critical to our democratic process. Thank you for the important work you do.

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Throughout our state over the last six years, we have made a New Wisconsin Promise to ensure a quality education for all our children by raising the achievement of all students and closing the achievement gap between economically disadvantaged students, students of color, and their peers. Because in Wisconsin, we have long held the belief that the days of our children should be better than our own.

And, for us, that has always meant that it was our responsibility to ensure our young people were prepared for their future role in the family, society, workplace, and as citizens.

We have much to be proud of in Wisconsin.

- Just this month, Wisconsin ranked in the top 10 in the nation for a child's chance of success and for K-12 achievement in the 2007 Quality Counts report.
- Overall, Wisconsin beat the nation once again on the ACT.
- On Advanced Placement exams, more Wisconsin students than ever before took exams and achieved better results.
- Seven Wisconsin metropolitan areas ranked in the top 25 nationally for public schools in the United States by Expansion Management Magazine.
- Our graduation rates continue to position us as national leaders.
- 4-year-old kindergarten has expanded to 257 school districts in this 150th anniversary year of the founding of our nation's first kindergarten in Watertown.
- Last year, Wisconsin was the first state to issue Financial Literacy Standards.
- International Education advanced through the work of our Statewide International Education Council.
- My High School Task Force delivered recommendations that emphasize rigor, relevance, and partnerships.
- And, our Quality Educator Initiative (PI-34) is working with districts throughout our state setting up exemplary systems. Last year we issued 4,900 initial educator licenses, 73 more Wisconsin educators earned National Board certification, and 13 administrators and teachers earned our first **Wisconsin** master educator licenses.

Yet, as education leaders, we know our public education system can and must continuously meet new challenges: that belief is central to our spirit and success.

In Wisconsin, we know public education is the foundation of our democracy and economic security in an increasingly competitive global economy.

While we have made tremendous gains and our students are showing considerable progress, we know that our real challenge is to go beyond the basics; go beyond the mandates of NCLB; and go beyond where we have traditionally set the bar to a place that empowers all students with the creativity and skills necessary to function and thrive in the 21st century.

We must provide students with the skills that are demanded in postsecondary learning environments or in the job markets of the global knowledge economy.

Our students will be competing with, and, most importantly, will need to collaborate with, students from around the world. How we educate this generation will determine our nation's economic security and will define what it means to be an American in the world today.

Wisconsin citizens recognize the importance of public education and our schools to the vitality of our communities.

Wisconsin citizens recognize that the single best investment we can make is in our children. Educated children become educated adults, who participate in the social, economic, and civic life of their community.

If our state is to be competitive we must invest in our human capital and ensure that our students pursue rigorous study.

Today, I am honored to make two major announcements:

Wisconsin takes a national leadership position as the third state recognizing the National Partnership for 21st Century Skills.

We must ensure our high school graduates have the skills required in our global society. The partnership's strength is that in addition to emphasizing core academic preparation, it goes beyond the basics and acknowledges the application of that academic preparation through critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, and teamwork, all of which are important skills identified by employers.

And, to compliment this effort, Wisconsin has joined the American Diploma Project. For the first time, our state will be developing PK-12 academic standards that are linked to higher education and workforce expectations.

Be assured, this is no one-size-fits-all approach. In close collaboration with Wisconsin's PK-12, higher education, and business leaders, we will develop our Wisconsin action plan.

We need these initiatives because we can no longer tolerate students being educated in a system designed for the 19th century, using 20th century curriculum, and then turning them loose in a 21st century digital world. The misalignment is too great and the stakes are too high.

We need to ensure our standards are high and students are ready to compete in the global marketplace.

And, at this critical crossroads, we do believe that working in partnership we can create a public education system, which brings relevance to academic, social, and emotional learning so every child graduates prepared to succeed in our interconnected world.

As education leaders, it is our responsibility to lead the transformation necessary to implement 21st century learning in our classrooms.

We are the united, strong voice that can tell the story of why public education must be the best choice for all of Wisconsin's children.

We must collectively articulate the message of the moral and economic imperative of quality public education in every school district in our state.

As Wisconsin's education leaders, we must tell our story in a strong, united voice over the next months of budget deliberations.

We must tell the story of our fiscal responsibility and efficient management of school districts.

Tell the story of the impact of NCLB, revenue caps, and budgets cuts in every district, school, classroom, and, most importantly, on every Wisconsin child's education.

We must tell our story and stand up for our students and their schools.

We have to stand up for:

- Special education categorical aid,
- Sparsity and transportation aid to relieve financially struggling rural districts,
- 4-year-old kindergarten and the SAGE Program,
- Help for declining enrollment districts,

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- And most importantly, we must stand up for continued two-thirds state funding.

We recognize that budget decisions made in the next months by Governor Doyle and the Legislature will affect our children, our schools, and our communities for years to come.

At this critical crossroads, we must stand up and lead Wisconsin forward.

At this moment in time, together as Wisconsin's education leaders, we are poised like no one else to change the educational landscape of the future. The time is now. And, we stand ready.

It is an honor to work for you and with you as together we fight for the children and quality education in Wisconsin.

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Elizabeth Burmaster is the elected state superintendent of public instruction.

NOTES: A high-resolution photo of the state superintendent is available for download on the Department of Public Instruction "Media Contacts and Resources" webpage at < <http://dpi.wisconsin.gov/eis/vm-media.html> >. The text of the 2007 State Education Convention Address is available electronically at < http://www.dpi.wi.gov/eis/pdf/dpi2007_09.pdf >.